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EDITORS' TABLE.

EDITORS: A. S. PACKARD AND E. D. COPE.

— While regard for human life distinguishes the European branches of the Aryan race, it can learn a good deal from some of the other branches and races in the matter of similar humanity to the lower animals. The destruction of harmless reptiles, almost universal among the less educated members of the white race, is not practiced by some of the others, notably by the Hindoos, who might be readily excused for wholesale extermination, such is the number of venomous species in their country. The kindness of this and other races to the wild Mammalia is well known. In few countries would be practiced, except by boys and savages, the wanton firing on bison from railroad trains, such as was common in this country while that fine animal was still abundant. Few civilized people would disgrace themselves as some of our English visitors formerly did by shooting scores of buffalo which would only walk away from them. It is still a favorite pastime for equally thoughtless "sportsmen" to shoot from steamers in Southern waters that last representative of the great saurians, the alligator.

The destruction of animal life for useful purposes is of course necessary, but here the greatest folly goes hand in hand with the greatest inhumanity. When it is a question of the natural products of the earth, bison, alligators, and in fact almost all wild animals have important economic values, and the intelligent economist will preserve them on this account alone. But it is the custom, in this country at least, to kill the goose that lays the golden egg, and to let the proprietor of sheol take the hindmost. Such is the destruction of fishes by dynamite cartridges, a practice in which none but an idiot could indulge, and which is fortunately punished by severe penalties. The latest case of wanton destruction is the sweeping of our Atlantic coast of surface fishes by the nets towed by the steamers of the U. S. Menhaden Oil and Guano Association. According to the statistics gathered by the investigating committee of the Senate of New Jersey, 450,000,000 of menhaden were captured during the year 1881, and 350,000,000 during 1882, and so on, and with them an enormous number of mackerel, blue-fish, weak-fish, etc. From one of the steamers 70,000 lbs. of food fishes were purchased in thirty days.

The testimony of all classes of fishermen shows that nearly all species of food fishes have been more than decimated by the operations of this company during a very few years. Here is a case where legislation is needed on behalf of the economic interests of fish consumers, and it is to be hoped that Senator Sewell's bill will receive due attention from Congress, and that the United States Fish Commission may become the executors of a stringent law. The destruction of menhaden alone should also be restricted, since that means the extinction of a large number of marine animals which live on them, mediately or immediately.

There is a surprising shortsightedness in all these methods of destroying animal life which is not characteristic of the best representatives of our race. In general, animal products stored in the earth will be found to be more extensive and more inexhaustible sources of supply than the bodies of the existing animals themselves. It would be better to let animals live and continue their beneficent function of filling the earth with valuable fertilizers, oils, etc., than to destroy the supply at its fountain-head. Moreover, the destruction of a great many apparently useless land animals leaves the earth at the mercy of insects, whose countless hordes mankind cannot successfully overcome. And who knows how many still more insidious foes are let loose by disturbing too much the balance of life.

— At the fourteenth meeting of the French Association, which was held at Grenoble in August last, M. de Mortillet reaffirmed his belief in the existence of man in the Tertiary period. He, however, said that the question was not to know if man as he exists at the present day already existed in the Tertiary period. Animals certainly varied from one geological stratum to another, and these variations increased as the strata were geologically distant. The higher the animals the greater the variation. It was to be inferred, then, that man would vary more rapidly than the other mammals. The problem, he said, as reported by *Nature*, was not to discover existing man in the Tertiary period, but only to find there an ancestral form of man, a predecessor of the man of historical times. The question was, Do there exist in the Tertiary strata objects which imply the existence of an intelligent being? He had no hesitation in saying there do. These objects have, in fact, been found at two different stages of the Tertiary period—in the Lower Tertiary at Thenay and in the Upper Tertiary at Otta; in Portugal and at Puy Courney in Cantal. These objects proved that at these two epochs there existed in Europe animals acquainted with the use of fire, and able, more or less, to cut stone. During the Tertiary period there existed, then, animals less intelligent than existing man but more intelligent than existing apes. This animal, to which M. Mortillet gives the name of *Anthropithecus* or ape-man, was, he maintains, an an-

cestral form of historic man, whose skeleton has not yet been discovered, but who has made himself known to us in the clearest manner by his works. A number of flints were exhibited from the strata in question which had been intentionally chipped and exposed to fire.

It appears that M. Mortillet carried his audience along with him, for after a long discussion the almost unanimous opinion was expressed, "that after this meeting and discussion at Grenoble, there can no longer be a doubt of the existence in the Tertiary period of an ancestral form of man!"

It is to be doubted, however, whether the slight amount of evidence which leaves no doubt in the minds of the French anthropologists will be altogether satisfactory to some of the doubting Thomases in this line of study. We shall want to examine the skull and bones, and other more conclusive evidences of human or semihuman art than those as yet discovered. Until then the truly cautious and scientific mind will hold itself in suspense.

— The desirability of State aid to scientific research is not only deducible from the importance of the exposition of the economic resources of a country, but from the necessity of sustaining its educational interests and progress. It is well-known that some branches of scientific research are too expensive to be carried on by private individuals, excepting those of the greatest wealth, and that such persons are very rarely interested in science. Our neighbors of the Republic of Mexico are following in our own footsteps, in this respect, in the establishment of a *Comision Cientifica*. This body is composed of the most learned men selected from all parts of the country, and is under the presidency of Dr. Fernando Ferrari-Perez of Puebla. Its object is research in every department of human knowledge. It is making extensive collections of all the natural products of the country, and will be, as we anticipate, of great advantage to the best interests of Mexico.

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RECENT LITERATURE.

WHITE'S REVIEW OF THE FOSSIL OYSTERS OF NORTH AMERICA.¹
—This memoir is designed rather as a general review than a revision of our fossil oysters, and is addressed to the general reader. The oldest oysters, as is well known, occur in the Carboniferous rocks and belong to the genus *Ostrea*; while *Exogyra* and *Gryphæa* are of Jurassic age, but culminated with the genuine oysters in the Cretaceous period; the family abounded more in

¹ *Department of the Interior, U. S. Geological Survey*, J. W. Powell, Director. A Review of the fossil *Ostreidæ* of North America, and a comparison of the fossil with the living forms. By CHARLES A. WHITE, M.D., with appendices by Professor ANGELO HEILPRIN and Mr. JOHN A. RYDER. Extract from the fourth annual report of the Director, 1882-1883. Washington, 1884. Large 8vo, pp. 279-333, Pls. 34-82.